

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. JOE MICON

INDIANAPOLIS – This week in the Legislature, I was pleased to support final approval of House Bill 1003, which includes a number of provisions aimed at attracting and retaining businesses in Indiana.

HB 1003 abolishes the Indiana Department of Commerce and moves its duties to the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, which will be chaired by the Governor.

In addition, several commissions have been abolished and their duties moved under the umbrella of the IEDC. Some of these include the Enterprise Zone Board, 21st Century Research and Technology Fund Board, Small Business Development Corporation and the Economic Development Council.

Two weeks ago, when I first had an opportunity to vote for HB 1003, I had several concerns about the level of public oversight included in the bill.

My greatest concern was that the initial version of the bill did not require the IEDC to adopt administrative rules, which are the internal laws that govern the actions of a state agency. Without being required to adopt administrative rules, the IEDC could pursue its mission without law or public oversight. Several amendments were offered to increase oversight, but all were defeated. I was pleased to see that the Senate did incorporate administrative rules in HB 1003, and that version was signed into law.

House Bill 1320, which requires that a public hearing takes place before a hospital construction project may begin, received final approval in the House this week. This bill requires the owners of hospital projects costing more than \$10 million to conduct at least two public hearings to provide information on the cost of the project and explain the need for a new facility. It will give residents a chance to voice their concerns about the project.

Also passing the Indiana House this week was House Bill 1326, which re-allocates unused CHOICE dollars back into the CHOICE fund. CHOICE – which stands for Community and Home Options to Institutional Care for the Elderly and Disabled – provides home and community based services for people with disabilities and the elderly.

Last year, \$5 million allocated for CHOICE went unused due to an oversight at the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA). Instead of returning to the CHOICE programs, these dollars reverted to the state budget's general fund, which is essentially the state's checkbook.

CHOICE currently serves 10,491 individuals, but has a waiting list of 20,807 people. With so many on the waiting list, HB 1326 is an important step to ensure that CHOICE recipients receive all of the funding that they need.

I was encouraged this week by the comments of Ways and Means Chairman Jeff Espich on the House floor. Espich promised that the Governor's budget bill would not come out of his committee without new money for public education and Medicaid. Espich's promised budget bill is in stark contrast to the Governor's plan, which flat-lines education funding and cuts Medicaid services, while raising income taxes on those making more than \$100,000 annually.

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